

Superconducting phase with a chiral f -wave pairing symmetry and Majorana fermions induced in a hole-doped semiconductor

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We show that a chiral $f + if$ -wave superconducting pairing may be induced in the lowest heavy hole band of a hole-doped semiconductor thin film through proximity contact with an s -wave superconductor. The chirality of the pairing originates from the 3π Berry phase accumulated for a heavy hole moving along a close path on the Fermi surface. There exist three chiral gapless Majorana edge states, in consistence with the chiral $f + if$ -wave pairing. We show the existence of zero energy Majorana fermions in vortices in the semiconductor-superconductor heterostructure by solving the Bogoliubov-de-Gennes equations numerically as well as analytically in the strong confinement limit.

PACS numbers: 74.20Rp, 03.65.Vf, 71.10.Pm, 74.45.+c

Superconductors/superfluids with unconventional pairings have been an important subject in condensed matter physics for many decades because of their rich physics and important applications. There has been considerable experimental evidence to support that the pairing symmetry in high- T_c superconductors is the d -wave [1]. The pairing symmetry in the superfluid ³He systems has been found to be p -wave [2]. The superconducting order parameters in Sr₂RuO₄ and some heavy-fermion materials are suggested to be the chiral $p_x + ip_y$ wave [3], although the true nature of the order parameters in these materials has not been fully settled in experiments [4, 5]. The importance of the chiral p -wave superconductor/superfluid is that the quasiparticle excitation inside a vortex is a zero-energy Majorana fermion with non-Abelian exchange statistics, which is a crucial ingredient for topological quantum computation (TQC) [6].

However, in contrast to the simple s -wave superconductor described by the BCS theory, the theoretical description and experimental identification of unconventional superconductivity and the associated exotic physics in natural solid state systems are often difficult, and in many systems, controversial. For instance, despite the tremendous technological potential, the observation of the exotic properties such as quantum half-vortices and non-Abelian statistics in Sr₂RuO₄ has been a serious problem because of the small quasiparticle excitation energy gap as well as the intrinsic spin-orbit coupling in the suggested p -wave order parameter [7]. Therefore it should be not only interesting, but also important to investigate whether various unconventional superconducting pairings and the associated exotic physics can be externally induced from conventional s -wave superconductors/superfluids [8–11]. For instance, schemes have been proposed recently to induce the zero-energy Majorana fermions in the vortex core of conventional s -wave superconductors that are proximately coupled to topological insulators or electron-doped semiconductors [9–11].

In this paper, we propose that a chiral $f + if$ -wave superconducting pairing can be induced in a *hole-doped* semiconductor thin film through the proximity contact with an s -wave superconductor. To the best of our knowledge, a chiral $f + if$ -wave superconducting pairing and the associated exotic physics have not been unequivocally identified in any condensed matter system. The induced chiral $f + if$ -wave pairing symmetry has a topological origin: the geometric phase [12, 13] of holes in the Bloch band. It is well known that an electron/hole evolving adiabatically in the reciprocal space accumulates a geometric phase associating with the adiabatic change of the quasi-momentum [13], in analogy to the Aharonov-Bohm phase acquired by electron moving in the real space in the presence of a magnetic field. The geometric phase is nonzero in the hole-doped semiconductors with non-vanishing spin-orbit coupling, which tunes an original s -wave pairing into a chiral $f + if$ -wave pairing for holes in the lowest energy band. The induced chiral $f + if$ -wave superconductor has a full pairing gap in the 2D bulk, and 3 gapless chiral Majorana fermions at the edge. By solving the Bogoliubov-de-Gennes (BdG) equations analytically and numerically, we show that there exists a Majorana zero energy state in the vortex core of the semiconductor-superconductor heterostructure in some parameter regions. The corresponding quasiparticle exchange statistics in this system is the same as that for a chiral p -wave superconductor or superfluid, therefore the proposed heterostructure can be used as a platform for observing non-Abelian statistics and performing TQC. The advantage of using hole-doped, instead of electron-doped, semiconductors for TQC is that hole-doped semiconductors have stronger spin-orbit coupling due to the larger effective mass of holes and the p -like symmetry of the valence band, resulting in larger carrier densities.

The physical system we consider is a heterostructure composed of an s -wave superconductor, a hole-doped semiconductor thin film, and a magnetic insulator (Fig. 1a). In the semiconductor thin film, the dynamics of

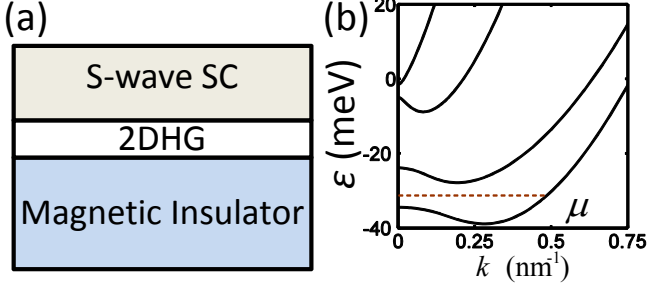


Figure 1. (Color online) (a) A schematic illustration of the heterostructure composed of a hole-doped semiconductor thin film, an *s*-wave superconductor, and a magnetic insulator. (b) The Band structure of the hole-doped semiconductor. The lower (upper) two bands are the HH (LH), respectively. $\alpha = 2 \times 10^5$ m/s, $\hbar\sqrt{\langle k_z^2 \rangle} = 3 \times 10^{-26}$ kg·m/s, $\gamma_1 = 6.92$, $\gamma_2 = 2.1$, $h_0 = 1.75$ meV. The parameters are chosen from GaAs (other materials such as InAs, InSb yield the same physics). The hole density is $\sim 4 \times 10^{12}$ cm $^{-2}$.

holes can be described by a single particle effective Hamiltonian that contains both Luttinger four band model and spin-3/2 Rashba term [14]

$$H_0 = \left[(\gamma_1 + 5\gamma_2/2) \mathbf{k}^2 - 2\gamma_2 (\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{J})^2 \right] / 2m + \alpha (\mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{k}) \cdot \hat{z} + 2h_0 J_z - \mu, \quad (1)$$

where \mathbf{J} is the total angular momentum operator for a spin-3/2 hole, γ_1 and γ_2 are the Luttinger parameters, μ is the chemical potential. Henceforth, we have set $\hbar = 1$. The confinement of the quantum well along the z direction makes the momentum be quantized on this axis, that is, $\langle k_z \rangle \approx 0$, $\langle k_z^2 \rangle = (\pi/a)^2$, where a is the thickness of the quantum well. α is the Rashba spin-orbit coupling strength. The crucial difference between the Rashba terms in the 2D hole and electron gases is that \mathbf{J} in the 2D hole gas is a spin-3/2 matrix, describing both the heavy holes (HH) and light holes (LH). The term $2h_0 J_z$ describes a Zeeman splitting induced either through the polarization of the local magnetic moments in the semiconductor [16] or the exchange field through the contact with a magnetic insulator.

The eigenstates of the Hamiltonian (1) can be written as

$$\Psi_{\mathbf{k}} = (u_0 e^{-i3\theta_{\mathbf{k}}}, iu_1 e^{-i2\theta_{\mathbf{k}}}, -u_2 e^{-i\theta_{\mathbf{k}}}, -iu_3)^T \quad (2)$$

where $\theta_{\mathbf{k}}$ is the azimuthal angle of \mathbf{k} , u_i are functions of k only and the eigenstates of the reduced Hamiltonian

$$\bar{H}_0 = -\gamma_2 k^2 J_y^2 / m - \alpha k J_x - \gamma_2 \langle k_z^2 \rangle J_z^2 / m + 2h_0 J_z. \quad (3)$$

The particular choice of the wavefunction in (2) ensures that the wavefunction for the lowest HH band is single-valued at $\mathbf{k} = 0$ (i.e., only $u_3 \neq 0$ at $\mathbf{k} = 0$). Additional total phase $e^{im\theta_{\mathbf{k}}}$ need be multiplied to the wavefunctions for the other bands to ensure the single value. In Fig.

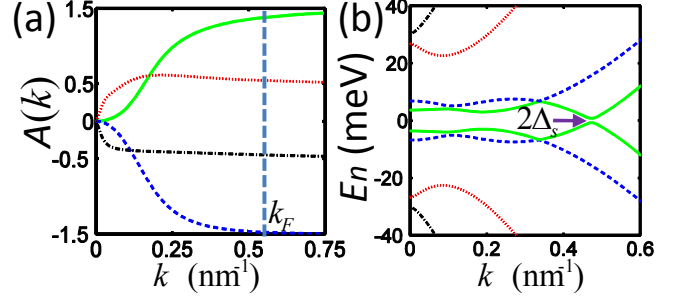


Figure 2. (Color online) (a) Plot of $A(k)$ with respect to k . (b) Plot of the bulk quasiparticle energy E_n of the BdG equation (9). Solid, dashed, dotted, and dashed dotted lines correspond to the lowest to the highest bands in Fig. 1b. $\mu = -32.5$ eV. The other parameters are the same as that in Fig. 1.

1b, we plot the eigenenergies with respect to k for the 2D hole gas. The degeneracy between different HH and LH bands at $k = 0$ is lifted due to nonzero $\langle k_z^2 \rangle$ and the Zeeman field h_0 . In the strong (weak) confinement region $2\gamma_2 \langle k_z^2 \rangle / m > (<) 4h_0$, the second lowest energy band is the HH (LH), and the corresponding wavefunction of the band can be written as $\Psi_{\mathbf{k}} e^{i3\theta_{\mathbf{k}}}$ ($\Psi_{\mathbf{k}} e^{i\theta_{\mathbf{k}}}$).

The proximity-induced superconductivity in the hole-doped semiconductor can be described by the Hamiltonian [17]

$$\hat{H}_p = \sum_{m_J=1/2,3/2} \int d\mathbf{r} \left\{ \Delta_s(\mathbf{r}) c_{m_J}^\dagger c_{-m_J}^\dagger + H.c. \right\}, \quad (4)$$

where $c_{m_J}^\dagger$ are the creation operators for holes with the angular momentum m_J and $\Delta_s(\mathbf{r})$ is the proximity-induced gap. When the chemical potential lies between the lowest two bands (Fig. 1b), and only the lowest HH band is occupied with holes, the effective superconducting pairing for holes becomes

$$\Delta_{eff} \propto \langle a_{\mathbf{k}} a_{-\mathbf{k}} \rangle \propto i \Delta_s g(k) \exp(i3\theta_{\mathbf{k}}), \quad (5)$$

where $a_{\mathbf{k}} = \sum_{m_J} \chi_{m_J} c_{\mathbf{k}m_J}$ is the annihilation operator for holes at the lowest HH state $\Psi_{\mathbf{k}}$, with the coefficient $\chi_{m_J} = \Psi_{\mathbf{k}m_J}^*$, $g(k) = 2(u_0 u_3 + u_1 u_2)$. We have used $\Delta_s \propto \langle a_{\mathbf{k}m_J} a_{-\mathbf{k}(-m_J)} \rangle$ and $\langle a_{\mathbf{k}m_J} a_{-\mathbf{k}m'_J} \rangle = 0$ if $m_J \neq -m'_J$ to derive Eq. (5). Clearly the pairing order Δ_{eff} has a chiral $f + if$ -wave symmetry. Around the Fermi surface $g(k) \rightarrow 1$, that is, $\Delta_{eff} \rightarrow i \Delta_s \exp(i3\theta_{\mathbf{k}})$.

The $3\theta_{\mathbf{k}}$ phase in Δ_{eff} originates from a 3π Berry phase accumulated when the holes move in the momentum space. In the lowest HH band, the Berry phase for a hole along a loop on the Fermi surface is

$$\phi = \int_{\mathbf{k}_1}^{\mathbf{k}_2} \mathbf{A} \cdot d\mathbf{k} = A(k_F) \delta\theta_{\mathbf{k}}, \quad (6)$$

where the Berry connection $\mathbf{A} = i \langle \Psi_{\mathbf{k}} | \nabla_{\mathbf{k}} | \Psi_{\mathbf{k}} \rangle = A(k) \nabla \theta_{\mathbf{k}}$ with $A(k) = (3u_0^2 + 2u_1^2 + u_2^2)$, $\delta\theta_{\mathbf{k}} = \theta_{\mathbf{k}_2} - \theta_{\mathbf{k}_1}$

is the change of the azimuthal angle from \mathbf{k}_1 to \mathbf{k}_2 . In Fig. 2a, we see $A(k) \rightarrow 3/2$ around the Fermi surface for the lowest HH state, indicating a $3\delta\theta_{\mathbf{k}}/2$ Berry phase (3π for a close loop) for a single hole and $3\delta\theta_{\mathbf{k}}$ phase for a Cooper pair. Therefore Δ_{eff} in the lowest band has a phase factor $\exp(i3\theta_{\mathbf{k}})$. Similarly, we can calculate the Berry connection for the other three upper bands. In Fig. 2a, we see the corresponding Berry phases are -3π , π , and $-\pi$, respectively, which means that the superconducting pairing symmetries for holes at the upper HH, lower LH, and upper LH bands are chiral $f - if$, $p_x + ip_y$, $p_x - ip_y$ -waves, respectively.

The physics origin of the chiral $f + if$ -wave superconducting pairing in the lowest HH band is more transparent in the strong confinement limit ($k \ll \sqrt{\langle k_z^2 \rangle}$), where the four band Hamiltonian (1) can be diagonalized into two effective two-band Hamiltonians for the HH and LH respectively. The effective Hamiltonian H_{hh} for the HH

$$H_{hh} = \eta_0 k^4 + \eta_1 k^2 + i\beta (k_-^3 \sigma_+ - k_+^3 \sigma_-) + 3h_0 \sigma_z - \bar{\mu}. \quad (7)$$

Here $k_{\pm} = k_x \pm ik_y$, $\sigma_{\pm} = (\sigma_x \pm i\sigma_y)/2$ are Pauli matrices applied on the two HH states (denoted as pseudospin \uparrow and \downarrow), η_i are the reduced coefficients, β is the effective coupling strength, $\bar{\mu}$ is the effective chemical potential. The Hamiltonian (7) is similar as the Rashba type of Hamiltonian for electron-doped semiconductors except that $k_x + ik_y$ is now replaced with $(k_x + ik_y)^3 = k \exp(i3\theta_{\mathbf{k}})$ and there is a k^4 term to ensure the bands bend up for a large k . Therefore a chiral $f + if$ -wave superconducting pairing is obtained when only the lowest HH band is occupied with holes.

A chiral $f + if$ -wave superconductor should have a full pairing gap in the 2D bulk, and $\mathcal{C} = 3$ gapless chiral Majorana fermions at the edge [18], where

$$\mathcal{C} = \frac{1}{2\pi} \sum_{E_n < 0} \int d^2\mathbf{k} \Omega_z^n \quad (8)$$

is the first Chern number in the momentum space, $\Omega_z^n = -2\text{Im}\langle \partial\Phi_n/\partial k_x | \partial\Phi_n/\partial k_y \rangle$ is the Berry curvature of the n -th band. E_n and Φ_n are eigenenergies and wavefunctions of the BdG equation, which, in the Nambu spinor basis, can be written as

$$\begin{pmatrix} H_0 & \Delta_s(\mathbf{r}) \\ \Delta_s^*(\mathbf{r}) & -\bar{\sigma}_x \tau_y H_0^* \tau_y \bar{\sigma}_x \end{pmatrix} \Phi_n(\mathbf{r}) = E_n \Phi_n(\mathbf{r}). \quad (9)$$

Here $\Phi_n(\mathbf{r}) = [u_{n,3/2} \ u_{n,1/2} \ u_{n,-1/2} \ u_{n,-3/2} \ v_{n,-3/2} \ v_{n,-1/2} \ -v_{n,1/2} \ -v_{n,3/2}]^T$ is the quasiparticle wavefunction, $\bar{\sigma}_x = \text{diag}(\sigma_x, \sigma_x)$, $\tau_y = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -iI_{2 \times 2} \\ iI_{2 \times 2} & 0 \end{pmatrix}$. In a uniform system with a constant $\Delta_s(\mathbf{r})$, the BdG equation (9) can be solved in the momentum space and the corresponding quasiparticle energy dispersions $E_n(k)$ are plotted in Fig. 2b. We see a $2\Delta_s$ energy gap is opened at the Fermi surface. Using the eigenwavefunctions Φ_n

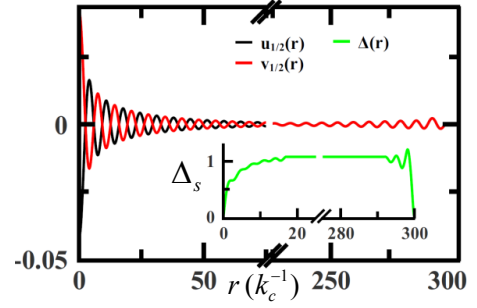


Figure 3. (Color online) Plot of the wavefunction of the zero energy state. $\mu = -32.5$ meV lies in the gap between two HH bands. The other parameters are the same as that in Fig. 1. Inset: Plot of the s -wave pairing gap with a vortex.

in the lowest four bands of the BdG equation (9) (i.e., $E_n < 0$), we confirm that the Chern number $\mathcal{C} = 3$, which is consistent with the chiral $f + if$ -wave superconducting pairing and yields 3 gapless chiral Majorana fermions at the edge of the superconductor.

The chiral $f + if$ -wave pairing may lead to novel exotic physics that has not been explored before (e.g., fractional Josephson effects [19]). Here we focus on the Majorana fermions in vortices in the heterostructure that can be used for TQC. In the presence of a vortex in the heterostructure, the pairing order parameter takes the form $\Delta_s(\mathbf{r}) = \Delta_s(r)e^{i\theta}$. For simplicity of the calculation, we consider a 2D cylinder geometry with a hard wall at the radius $r = R$ and a single vortex at $r = 0$. This system preserves the rotation symmetry and the BdG equation can be decoupled into different angular momentum channels indexed by l with the corresponding spinor wavefunction $\Phi_n^l(\mathbf{r}) = e^{il\theta} [u_{n,3/2}^l e^{-i\theta}, u_{n,1/2}^l, u_{n,-1/2}^l e^{i\theta}, u_{n,-3/2}^l e^{2i\theta}, v_{n,-3/2}^l e^{-2i\theta}, v_{n,-1/2}^l e^{-i\theta}, v_{n,1/2}^l, v_{n,3/2}^l e^{i\theta}]^T$. Here u and v are functions of r only. The special form of $\Phi_n^l(\mathbf{r})$ is chosen to preserve the particle-hole symmetry at $l = 0$ and to remove the θ dependence in the BdG equation (9). If $\Phi_n^l(\mathbf{r})$ is a solution with an energy E , then there is another solution with the energy $-E$ in the $-l$ channel. Henceforth we only consider $E \geq 0$ solutions.

Generally the BdG equation (9) with a vortex cannot be solved analytically. Here we numerically solve the Eq. (9) and calculate the quasiparticle eigenenergies and eigenwavefunctions. In the calculation, we use the pairing gap Δ_s from a self-consistence solution of the BdG equation for a pure s -wave superconductor with a small size of the system $R = 25k_c^{-1}$ (the Fermi vector k_c for the s -wave superconductor is chosen as 0.5 nm^{-1}). Because the pairing gap approaches the bulk value in a distance much larger than k_c^{-1} , we can extend the pairing gap to a larger system $R = 300k_c^{-1}$ by inserting the uniform bulk value (see the inset in Fig. 3). We find that there exists a unique zero energy solution when the chemical potential μ lies in the gap between the lowest two HH

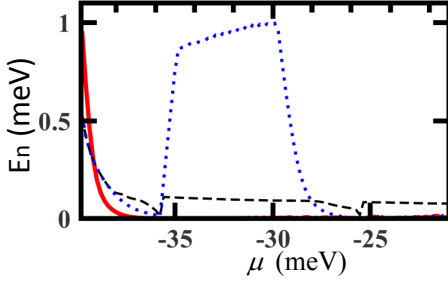


Figure 4. Plot of the quasiparticle energies in a vortex core with respect to the chemical potential μ . Solid: zero energy state; Dashed: the minigap. Dotted: the bulk excitation gap. The parameters are the same as that in Fig. 1.

bands (Fig. 1b). In Fig. 3, we plot the two components $u_{0,1/2}^0(r)$ and $v_{0,1/2}^0(r)$ of the zero energy wavefunction $\Phi_0^0(\mathbf{r})$ and find $u_{0,1/2}^0(r) = -v_{0,1/2}^0(r)$. We also confirm that $u_{0,m_J}^0(r) = -v_{0,m_J}^0(r)$ for other m_J . Therefore the Bogoliubov quasiparticle operator, defined as

$$\gamma_n^\dagger = i \int d\mathbf{r} \sum_{m_J} [u_{nm_J}(\mathbf{r})c_{m_J}^\dagger(\mathbf{r}) + v_{nm_J}(\mathbf{r})c_{m_J}(\mathbf{r})], \quad (10)$$

satisfies $\gamma_0^\dagger = \gamma_0$, which is a self-Hermitian Majorana operator. Consider two Majorana operators γ_A and γ_B in two vortices. It is easy to show $\gamma_A \rightarrow \gamma_B$, $\gamma_B \rightarrow -\gamma_A$ upon an exchange of two vortices [20]. Therefore the Majorana zero energy modes satisfy the same non-Abelian braiding statistics as that in a chiral p -wave superconductor/superfluid [21, 22] and can be used for TQC.

In Fig. 4, we plot the zero energy state (the lowest energy level at the $l = 0$ channel), the bulk excitation gap (the first excitation at the $l = 0$ channel), and the minigap energy (the lowest energy level in the vortex core at the $l = 1$ channel) with respect to the chemical potential μ . When μ lies in the gap between the lowest two HH bands, there exists a unique zero energy solution, which originates from the broken time reversal symmetry of the chiral $f + if$ -wave superconducting pairing. The minigap is the topological gap protecting the Majorana fermions at the zero energy states and the associated non-Abelian braiding statistics from finite temperature effects. The numerical results show that the magnitude of the minigap is at the order between Δ_s and Δ_s^2/E_F . Additional numerical calculation shows that Majorana zero energy solutions also exist for a vortex with a winding number -3 or other odd numbers. We also find that the Majorana zero energy modes exist when the second lowest band is LH, instead of HH.

The existence of the Majorana zero energy modes can also be demonstrated analytically in the strong confinement limit. In this limit, the single particle Hamiltonian H_0 is replaced with H_{hh} in (7). The spinor wavefunction at the angular momentum l channel changes to $\Phi_n^l(\mathbf{r}) = e^{il\theta} [u_{n\uparrow}^l e^{-i\theta}, u_{n\downarrow}^l e^{2i\theta}, v_{n\downarrow}^l e^{-2i\theta}, -v_{n\uparrow}^l e^{i\theta}]^T$. The corresponding BdG equation can be further reduced to a

2×2 matrix form

$$\begin{pmatrix} F_0 - \bar{\mu} + 3h_0 & \beta F_1 + \lambda \Delta_s \\ -\beta F_2 - \lambda \Delta_s & F_4 - \bar{\mu} - 3h_0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} u_\uparrow(r) \\ u_\downarrow(r) \end{pmatrix} = 0 \quad (11)$$

for a zero energy state after θ is eliminated using the wavefunction $\Phi_n^l(\mathbf{r})$ and the particle-hole symmetry of the wavefunction is taken into account [10]. Here $F_0(r) = \eta_0 (Q - r^{-2})^2 + \eta_1 (Q - r^{-2})$, $F_1(r) = \partial_r (\partial_r + r^{-1}) (\partial_r + 2r^{-1})$, $F_2(r) = (\partial_r + r^{-1}) \partial_r (\partial_r - r^{-1})$, $F_4(r) = \eta_0 (Q - 4r^{-2})^2 + \eta_1 (Q - 4r^{-2})$, $Q = \frac{\partial^2}{\partial r^2} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r}$, $u_\sigma(r) = \lambda v_\sigma(r)$. We approximate the radial dependence of Δ_s as a step function, *i.e.*, $\Delta_s = 0$ for $0 \leq r \leq \xi$, and Δ_0 for $r > \xi$. Detailed analysis of the wavefunction $(u_\uparrow(r), u_\downarrow(r))^T$ shows that there are four and five independent solutions of Eq. (11) inside and outside the vortex core respectively in the parameter region $\lambda = -1$ and $\bar{\mu}^2 + \Delta^2 < 9h_0^2$. The corresponding 9 unknown superposition coefficients for the total wavefunction match with the 9 constraints from the continuity of the wavefunction (up to the third order derivative) and the normalization condition, yielding a unique zero energy solution.

In summary, we show that a chiral $f + if$ -wave superconducting pairing and the associate Majorana physics may be induced in a hole-doped semiconductor thin film through the proximity contact with an s -wave superconductor. The proposed Berry phase mechanism in this system presents a new possibility for studying unconventional pairing symmetry, which is distinctly different from the conventional scenario in which the pairing is induced by the Boson-exchange electron-electron interaction mechanism.

C.Z. thanks Kai Sun and Jay Sau for valuable discussion. L.M. and C.Z. are supported by DARPA-MTO (FA955-10-1-0497), DARPA-YFA (N66001-10-1-4025) and ARO (W911NF-09-1-0248). J.S. is supported by 973 program No. 2009CB929101 and NSFC 10734110. Q.N. is supported in part by DoE (DE-FG02-02ER45958, Division of Materials Sciences and Engineering) and the Welch Foundation (F-1255).

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